About This Particular Macintosh

April 1995

Hi there, and welcome to a regular feature on the state of my Mac and its environs. I hope to entertain, and maybe to inform as well. Originally I planned to simply call this "About this Macintosh..." but, while the name is inspired, it has apparently inspired someone else as well. **MacSense**, an impressive electronic publication, has just debuted a new column of the same name in its April issue. I don't want to be a — how do the French say it... a copy chat? — so I have made the title of my 'zine a little more specific.

In this first edition I talk about my own computers — past and present — and what I may have learned from them over the years. I discuss something I call the "coolness factor," and I suggest a few shareware programs and a game you might like. I end with a somewhat pretentious "words of wisdom" indulgence and a humble appeal for e-mail.

I trust you will forgive me if, in covering all of the above, I ramble on a bit.

RD Novo

ATPM 1.01

About My Computers...

I am one of the many souls who lucked out in the computer lottery: I got a **Macintosh IIci**. There aren't many Mac models that can beat this thing for long life or versatility. It has lasted me three and a half years, and I intend to have it last me another three. I bought back when you could still order computers from Apple with no hard drive installed, and over the years I've ordered all kinds of gadgets and games to go along with it. If you're in the market for a used Mac, you can't do better at a suggested **$650†**.

The experience of owning this computer, and others I have had over the years, has taught me a number of things about the Mac, about computing, and I daresay, about life. Specifically, I have come to realize that every Macintosh has an inherent "coolness factor" that determines how long it stays in your life. Let me illustrate.

My first computer was an **Apple IIe** back in junior high. As one of the first computers I got to touch, it had a very high coolness factor. You could play games on it, you could make neat posters with Print Shop, you could print out professional-looking documents. (Hey! Dot-matrix printing was cool back then.)

Then, in 1987, I saw my first **Macintosh Plus** in the computer lab at my high school. Here was a computer with a much higher coolness quotient than that of my poor IIe. It was small. It was cute. It had sharp graphics. It had icons. You could do the school's yearbook on it. I had to have one. My Apple IIe had outlived its coolness factor, and I knew I needed a new computer.

My first year in college I bought a **Macintosh SE** with two 800k disk drives. This computer was even better than the old Mac Plus, mostly because of the two disk drives. Here was a feature no other computer had. Here was something I could do with my computer that nobody else could. A month later I realized that the coolness factor has nothing to do with the practical capabilities of your Mac. I desperately needed a hard drive, a feature I had passed up for the ability to read two floppy disks at once. I bought myself an **80 MB external hard disk** from a reputable company that filed for bankruptcy two years later. I think the disk is still working though. The hard disk, while showing me just how stupid my original purchase was, fit right under my computer, kind of like a pedestal, raising both the computer's coolness factor and the computer itself. I bought an **ImageWriter** and a **2400 baud modem**, and I was the hippest guy in the dorm.

Then came the long dry spell. The coolness quotient of a computer never goes down. In fact, if your computer is old enough, the coolness factor begins to climb based on that alone. But every model that comes out after yours is inherently cooler than yours. I watched miserably while new computers climbed way past my trusty SE. Color was the first big hit to my computer-esteem. Then they started getting faster, with bigger hard drives. People started to own laser printers. New versions of the system software came out. Games started appearing that wouldn't run on my platform. I took solace in the fact that these new computers didn't have the all-in-one form factor of my old SE. At least they weren't as cool that way. Then the **Macintosh SE/30** came out, just like my computer only a billion times faster. I knew it was time for a new computer.

I sold my three-year-old SE and bought a **Macintosh IIci**. Now this was a cool computer. For one thing, it had color. I'd spent three and a half years playing games in black and white, and unless you've done that, you don't know what a change it is to experience color for the first time. (If you're still using a black and white computer you get bonus coolness points for trying.) And this computer was fast. Plus, I'd ordered a **IIci-128k Cache Card** from Micron to make it even faster, and thus cooler, than a stock IIci. I was delighted.

When I cracked open my computer to install my new card, I noticed that the computer already had one. Nobody had bothered to tell me that Apple shipped cache cards pre-installed, and there I was with an extra card worth several hundred dollars. Trying to convince myself that my purchase had not been in vain, I swapped my card for the one Apple had installed. I still like to think the computer runs faster that way.

Anyhow, the Apple cache card has been relegated to the "maybe I can make jewelry out of it" pile. I determined right then to learn more about the Mac, and I began reading all the magazines, some of which I'll recommend next month. Being an informed person, whether you're buying a computer or discussing the new blue M&M, is never a bad sort of person to be.

In ordering my Mac, I had asked that it be delivered without a hard drive. I wanted to buy my own, to have complete control over how cool my computer would be. I ordered a **210 MB internal hard drive** from Alliance Peripheral Systems (**APS**) and was relieved to note that Apple had not decided to surprise me with a hard drive the way they had with the cache card. As it turns out, I made an excellent decision with regard to the APS internal drive and I highly recommend their products. My hard drive has never failed (knock on wood) and it is the quietest drive I have ever heard. Or not heard. My editorial friend, Nancy, adds her **two cents**, "I heartily agree with your praise of APS, and add to it praise for the very helpful and friendly staff people. I can also vouch for their external hard drives... mine is quiet, fast, and just generally spiffy. It looks nice too."

You see how the process of switching computers is a progression of coolness. Similarly, upgrading your computer is a way to try and keep your coolness quotient in line with current technology, without having to replace the whole thing.

Three years after buying my IIci, with the only improvement during that time being a faster modem (keeping up with the neighbors is worth no coolness points), I decided that a 210 MB hard drive was too small. After all, you get coolness points for every 100 MB of unused hard disk space. So I bought a **105 MB removable hard drive**, again from APS. Unfortunately, it came with the wrong cable. Or rather, it came with the right cable... it just wasn't the cable I needed. Your Mac talks to peripherals like hard drives and CD-ROMs through the SCSI port. The port on the back of my Mac is a 25 pin port (there are 25 of the little pins) while the ports on the back of SCSI devices have 50 pins. Therefore, the cables that come with these devices have 50 pins at one end, and 25 pins at the other. Unfortunately, my CD-ROM is already plugged into the computer, so my new APS drive had to be connected to the back of the CD-ROM in a daisy chain fashion. And the second port on the CD-ROM is like the first, it has 50 pins. I needed a 50 to 50 pin cable, not the 25 to 50 cable that came with my new drive.

A trip to the corner computer store and **twenty dollars** later, I had everything up and working. The drive, a SyQuest mechanism, is not very quiet at all, but I don't use it much, so that's okay. I have one disk with a backup of essential stuff from my hard drive (in case it ever does decide to fail), one with all the games I own, and another with overflow programs from my hard drive.

Upgrading your hardware is nice, and it certainly should improve the coolness factor of any computer. But more hard drive space, faster processors, and speedier modems aren't very sexy. If you're looking for a big jump in coolness you need to do what I did last fall. You need to get the **Apple Multimedia Kit**. It includes a CD-ROM drive, some software, headphones, and Apple's Powered Speakers II. Turns out that before I could enjoy it much, I needed more memory to get anything to run, so I plunked down more money and ended up with **12 MB of internal memory** from TechWorks. Installation was a snap with the instruction book TechWorks provided, and soon I was running five applications at once just because I could. But the process left me with four 256 k memory modules and no way to use them. Now they, too, reside in the "someday I'll make pretty green necklaces" pile.

I bought the Multimedia Kit because I was going to be writing a regular column for Inside Mac Games, a CD only electronic magazine. I thought I should be able to read the magazine I was going to write for. However, I must admit that I use the CD-ROM mostly to listen to music CDs. Sure, I have a stereo available to me, but it's just plain fun to hear **Ella and Louis** coming out of my Mac's speakers.

In the end I have a pretty cool system. It's relatively fast, very expandable, and has a lot of memory. I have stereo speakers, a CD-ROM, and a removable hard drive for unlimited storage. I can play music CDs, run the best games available, and connect to any online service I choose. And yet, I find that I am not satisfied. I have a hankering for further coolness.

What I really want is to watch **TV on my Mac**. That's the coolest thing I can imagine. Yes, I know it's possible with the more recent Macs and Apple's TV Tuner card, but this is where my IIci falls short.

I can connect all sorts of things to this machine to make it cooler than it is. I can give it 128 MB of RAM (and if I had the money I would). I can add a high quality microphone and have it recognize my voice. I can use high end graphics programs to modify and distort photos of my friends and enemies. I can hook up the best printers and produce world-class publications from my desktop. I can attach a 21 inch color monitor to quadruple my screen space. I can even add a PowerPC processor to give my computer the speed of a Power Macintosh 6100/60.

But I can't watch TV on my Mac.

And I really, really want to.

When I bought this computer I firmly believed the lifespan of computers to be four years. And I knew that I'd wait for the PowerPCs to come out before I invested in a new CPU. The time for upgrading is fast approaching, and I even know what model I'd replace it with: the as yet unannounced **LC 5200**. According to MacWEEK (02.27.95) it'll look like a 15" monitor on a tilt and swivel stand. Along the bottom of the "monitor" there will be two speakers, a CD-ROM, a floppy drive, picture controls, an infrared port, and a headphone jack. It'll have a PowerPC 603 inside, and yes, it'll accept the TV Tuner card. It is perfect for me. The all-in-one form factor appeals to the gadgeteer side of me, the features are cutting edge, and it is much faster, bigger, and cooler than my IIci. Plus, at an estimated $1800, it's a cool $2000 cheaper than what I paid for my IIci in 1992.

And yet, I am not going to buy it. I am going to watch TV on my television for the forseeable

future. I am going to limit the coolness of my Mac.

Why? Well, I recently hooked up with another Mac user, and I have every intention of spending the rest of my life with her. Tiffany owns a **Macintosh IIsi**, and we both acknowledge that my computer has a longer "useful lifespan" than hers (ie. mine is cooler). So, when we feel we have enough money, we'll sell the IIsi and get her another computer. And because of the nature of her work, we'll get a portable, probably a PowerBook.

But you can't watch TV on a PowerBook. I mean, sure, if TV won't come to your Mac, at least you can take your PowerBook to the TV. But it's just not as cool.

And you have to admit, we still buy Macs because they're cool. Productive, sure. Easy to use, yes. Fast, finally. But we like 'em 'cause they're cool. That's why Apple will do just fine, despite all the hoopla about clones and Microsoft. In ten years we'll still buy computers directly from Apple because they're the coolest thing on the market.

Maybe by then the portables available will be really cool, too.

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How Cool is Your Mac?

Do you want to know if it's time to upgrade? Are you interested in how your computer stacks up to the competition? Use this handy scoring guide to determine how cool your computer is. First consider your current setup, the computer, what peripherals you have attached, and so on. Write down your coolness factor. If you have more than one computer, you can add their scores together to achieve a **household coolness rating**. Then do the same for any computer you might buy as a replacement. Be sure to add up any printers, modems, or hard drives you would keep from your original setup. I have provided an example at the end of the scoring list.

Out of the Box:

1 point for being a computer. They are inherently cool.
1 point if it has a colorful, rainbow-striped apple on the outside. After all, we pay for it.
1 point if it runs the Macintosh operating system.
1 point if your computer is an all-in-one design.
1 point if both a keyboard **and** a monitor came with your computer. We want to encourage this kind of behavior on Apple's part. Selling incomplete machines is not cool.
1 point if it has an internal hard drive. I learned my "Mac SE with two 800k floppies" lesson.
1 point if it has a pre-installed CD-ROM drive.
1 point if it has a PowerPC inside.
1 point if you can turn your computer on from the keyboard. This is way cool.

Points for Your Stuff:

1 point if you have a printer attached to your computer.
1 more point if your printer is a laser printer.
1 more point if your printer is a color printer.
1 point for every other peripheral attached to your computer. This includes stereo speakers (not built in speakers), external storage devices like hard drives or tape drives, modems, CD-ROMs, a coffee pot, whatever. Sorry, your mouse doesn't count.
1 point for every 8 MB of RAM (or fraction thereof) installed in your computer.
1 point for every accelerator card installed, making your Mac faster than others of its ilk.
1 point for potential coolness if your computer has empty expansion slots.
1 point if your computer is part of a local area network (LAN).

Points for Blatant Excess:

1 point for every 100 MB of unused hard disk space.
1 point for every extra monitor attached to your Mac.
2 points if you've dispensed with a modem completely and use ISDN instead.
1 point if your computer answers your telephone.
1 point for each additional processor in your computer. That includes the DOS on Mac card from Reply Corp. and PowerPC upgrades that keep your original processor in place.
1 point if you have foot-actuated rudder pedals for that complete flight simulation experience.
1 point if your Mac actually answers when you talk to it.
1 point if you have the Apple TV Tuner card and refuse to watch normal TV anymore.

1 point if your monitor tracks you as you walk around your room. Not that I've seen this, but it would be cool, no?

Points for Trying:

1 point if your computer is over five years old, and yet you still use it regularly. (Keeping important papers from blowing away in a stiff breeze does not constitute regular use.)
1 point if you still haven't upgraded to a color Macintosh.
1 point if you have resisted owning a Microsoft compatible machine too. It's okay if they force you to use one at the office, we can't punish you for the corporate nincompoops you work for.
1 point if you think your Newton is so good, you don't need a computer.
5 points if you still don't own a computer (and you're using someone else's to read this). It's getting to the point where ignoring the information superhighway (and its attendant metaphors) is retro-chic, and that's sort of French for "cool."

The Bottom Line

Fresh from the factory, my **Macintosh IIci** had an inherent coolness factor of **11**. It consisted of the computer — with 5 MB of RAM and a few empty expansion slots — a 13" color monitor, a hard drive with 120 MB of free space, an ImageWriter dot-matrix printer, and a 2400 baud modem. I did not own a Microsoft compatible machine. Since then, I have added three peripherals, 7 MB of RAM, and I have very little hard drive space left. I have enhanced my computer's coolness to **14**.

Now I compare it to my dream system. If I won the lottery today I'd buy a **Power Macintosh 7100/80CD AV** with 16 MB of RAM, a 700 MB hard drive, and a CD-ROM for $3,599. I would keep my printer, my original monitor (I'd buy another for about $1,000), and all my peripherals. Then I'd get a Dos on Mac card from Reply Corp. ($600), and I'd get the TV Tuner card from Apple ($450?). With all that and 400 MB free on my huge hard drive, my computer setup would have a whopping coolness factor of **24**! That's a clear 10 points higher than my current setup.

So the answer is, yes, it is time to upgrade. Unfortunately it would cost me about $5600, and I haven't got a dime to do it with.

What could I get for what I am willing to pay, about $2000? I could buy a **Performa 638 CDV** from MacMall, a mail order retailer. I'd get an '040 chip, not a PowerPC, but it does have 8 MB of RAM, a 350 MB hard drive, a CD-ROM, a 15" monitor (and keyboard), a 9600 baud modem (which I'd scrap in favor of the one I already own), and the all-important Apple TV Tuner card. Add two empty slots and you have a winner. With my printer, my hard drives, and my speakers, the coolness factor would be... **14**.

It's not time to upgrade after all. For $1200 I could add a PowerPC to my IIci and add 2 points to the coolness factor immediately, raising the ante again.

For some contrast, a loaded ($3,499) Micron P90 PowerStation **pentium**–powered machine comes with a CD-ROM, a keyboard, a 15" monitor, a hard drive, a graphics accelerator card and 16 MB of Ram, for a coolness factor of only **7**. If I were to actually buy the thing, it would still only have a value of 7 because I'd have to buy a new printer, a new modem, etc.

Like It?

So, how do you like this handy system? While it is a tiny bit tongue-in-cheek, I'm thinking it might actually be useful for something. Think you can improve on it? Write to me (at **rdnovo@eworld.com**) and let me know what you would change.

Worth Downloading

Every month I come across lots of shareware online, and in this section I let you know about some of the best I've found. These are programs I have used extensively, so I know they work faultlessly on my system, and I know that I use them regularly. I have a Macintosh IIci with 12 MB of RAM and System 7.5 with QuickDraw GX installed.

CD Menu 1.3.1

Size: **41k**
Fee: **$10**. Yes, I have paid.

If playing music CDs on your Mac delights you the way it does me, you can't be without CD Menu 1.3.1 by Henrik Eliasson. It will play your CDs automatically when you insert them. It gives you access to all the CD controls, including volume, from your menu bar in any application. And it lets you assign hot keys for stop, play, skipping tracks, and best of all, eject. (No more exiting your application to drag the CD to the Trash!) I have five function keys on my extended keyboard dedicated to the task, and it raises the coolness factor of my Mac a lot. The author is very supportive, the shareware fee is reasonable, and it is available on all your local online services. CD Menu requires System 7.0 or higher, and a color capable Macintosh.

HoverBar 1.0

Size: **45k**
Fee: **$5**. Yup, this one's paid too.

I've also got to rave about HoverBar 1.0, by Guy Fullerton. The shareware fee is tiny compared to the sheer utility you get from this program. You create bars, which are rows of icons, that include whatever applications, documents, or folders you want to have appear. Each bar can be tied to a specific application. For example, I've got one called "Internet Bar" that is displayed when I launch InterSLIP to make an Internet connection. From this bar I can access Netscape, Eudora, NewsWatcher, TurboGopher, Fetch, Anarchie... whatever I want. And on my desktop I have several bars along the bottom of the screen. I keep UnStuffIt there, as well as my most frequently used programs (like InterSLIP). And with a customizable key-press (I use Command-`) the whole thing just disappears. It's simpler than adding another menu, or cluttering the Apple Menu more than it already is, and it isn't as inconvenient as Control Strip... and besides, it's cool. HoverBar requires System 7.1 or higher, Drag & Drop 1.1, and the Finder Scripting Extension 1.2, all available from Apple's online archives. If you have System 7.5, it's all included.

DOCMaker 4.1

Size: **167k**
Fee: **$25**. Not paid.

I feel obliged to mention DOCMaker 4.1, by Mark Wall. (And before you get all huffy, I'm holding my money in reserve until I'm sure I'll be doing another issue of APTM.) DOCMaker is the program with which I have created this electronic publication, and I gotta tell you, it's amazing. You can format text, use pictures, have buttons (try clicking on the DOCMaker icon above), print, and best of all, produce stand-alone documents that don't require any particular application on the reader's Mac. The shareware fee is a bit steep so I recommend that you make sure you'll use it before you decide to keep it. However, if you intend to publish electronically on the Mac, DOCMaker is the best tool available. Check out this document and you'll see what I mean.

Debump 1.1

Sixe: **39k**
Fee: **$10**. In the mail.

While DOCMaker is the program most directly responsible for this electronic magazine, Debump 1.1 by John O'Fallon is at least as valuable to me. With Debump you paste any PICT file, including text saved in a paint program, into the main window, and then you... well, you "de-bump" it. (The process is actually called anti-aliasing.) Your graphic image becomes much smaller along the way, but it looks very nice. I have used Debump on the title text for this publication, and as you can see below, the difference is remarkable. The text on the left is 36 point, while the text on the right was 72 point before it was debumped. Mr. O'Fallon says in his Read Me that he is interested in improving Debump to avoid this shrinking effect. But for now, for a small shareware fee, you, too, can have the power to make graphics look cool.

Bumpy	Debump-ed
Example	Example

The Game This Month...

*In this section I let you know what I've been playing most this past month. Usually that's a good indication that the game has some staying power. It's not that I get bored easily, but if a game proves too hard, or too frustrating (or, okay, too boring) I don't need to conquer it. There are other things I should be doing. Any game that makes it into this section has got to be pretty good. This is **not** a game review. These are just some thoughts I had about the game I've been playing. So let's get on to the game for this month...*

Warlords II

The game I'm playing most is still **Warlords II**, from Strategic Simulations Group (**SSG**). I've tackled it several times a week for about three months now, and I suspect I will continue to so for many months to come.

Of course, that could be because the subject appeals to me. Dragons, griffins (or griffons, depending on who you are), elves, dwarves, orcs... I'm a fan of the fantasy **milieu**. (French again, stands for "an environment or setting" but I had to look it up.) Plus, I enjoy wargames. Plotting strategy, laying supply lines, planning ten moves ahead... then throwing caution to the wind when you realize your best laid plans are for the mice. If either the **fantasy** or the **strategy** appeal to you, this is a great game.

But Warlords (the game to which this one is a sequel) had all of that too. And I stopped playing it after a short while. What, you ask, is different about Warlords II?

Well, I can play by e-mail. Warlords II was written with **PowerTalk** hooks included. That's Apple's communications technology that came with the System 7.5 software. Unfortunately, it takes up so much RAM and so few programs actually use it, that I have not bothered to load it on my Mac. No worries. Instead of using PowerTalk, I just save the my Warlords II game to disk, and send the file over the Internet to a friend in New York City. She sends it back when she's done with her turn. But I could do that with any old game, you say. I could have done that with the original Warlords.

Well sure. But I didn't think of that 'til the folks at SSG printed it on the box.

Regardless, playing against a **person**, whether at home or by e-mail, is much more challenging than playing against the computer. The artificial intelligence of the computer opponents is pretty good, and certainly much improved over the original Warlords. But you can still beat them on a regular basis, even at the hardest levels. Playing against a person really levels the playing field. It's also really easy to **cheat** against the computer. (Perhaps one of the underlying reasons it's easy to beat the computer?) I've discovered that the best way to win is to save the game right before important battles. I know that I can beat a dragon with one measly light infantry... eventually. When my foot soldiers get fried to a crisp, I just quit and reload the

game from my last saved position. Then my little heroes try again. Sometimes it takes a little patience, but it usually works.

In my e-mail games against friends, I refrain from using such tactics. (Honest!) It is no more difficult to cheat against human players, it's just unfair. But against the computer I have no such ethical constraints.

We have taken to calling each other names, insulting each other's elephants, and laughing over our enemies. It's just been fun. We are carrying two games now, and when one of them fizzles out, I plan to introduce a game using the blacked-out map option. The game starts with the map entirely hidden, and your armies uncover it as they travel. Very cool, especially against another person. And that serves to sum the game up too. Warlords II is very cool, especially against another person.

I'm looking forward to the release of the construction set SSG is preparing. This'll allow me to build custom maps and armies, the better to re-create the wars described in my favorite fiction. Just another reason to keep this game on my hard drive.

I should also mention that the icon above is of my own devising, based on the icon for the original Warlords game. The application icon for Warlords II was... well, not so nice looking.

Also...

I'm also pretty excited to discover that **Master of Orion** has been released for the Macintosh. Affectionately called **MOO** by its devoted fans, this game has garnered nothing but high praise from all quarters. Originally published—many moons ago—by MicroProse, the Mac conversion was handled by **Take 2 Interactive**. Jerry Pournelle, sci-fi author extraordinaire and computer columnist for **BYTE**, once thought MOO was the best thing since manned exploration of the moon. That's high enough praise that I might buy it sight unseen.

I'll tell you more next time.

Something to Talk About

With apologies to Bonnie Raitt.

Henry David Thoreau, from "Economy" in his book, <u>Walden</u>.

"I have lived some thirty years on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors... One farmer says to me, 'You cannot live on vegetable food solely, for it furnishes nothing to make bones with'; walking all the while he talks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plough along in spite of every obstacle."

Yowza!

You've gotten this far and you deserve some sort of reward. Or at least a contest... Send e-mail to me at **rdnovo@eworld.com** and suggest a contest that I should hold. The winner of this "Come up with a contest" contest will get a nice note from me and anything I can find in the "give me away" box.

Please also feel free to attach any notes, suggestions, praise, poetry, offers of free software, or (gasp!) criticisms. Tell me what works for you and what doesn't. Attack my intellect (or lack of it), praise my wit. But if you want to **take me to task** for being brazen enough to do this in the first place, send me nothing at all. There's nothing lonelier than an empty mailbox.

Thanks again for getting this far.

Next Time...

Lately I've been thinking a lot about the shareware concept, about the Microsoft-Apple (I wish they'd get on with it) flap and about the best way to ship my Mac. I'll also let you know what I think about the Mac magazines out there, both printed and electronic, and while I'm at it I'll probably carry on about the various online services I frequent. Media and the Mac. Stay tuned.

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...endnotes

† The price quoted for a Macintosh IIci (**$650**) is from the United Computer Exchange index as of February 6, 1995, as printed in the May, 1995 issue of MacUser. As with all Apple offerings, this price doesn't include a monitor or a keyboard. A Macintosh IIsi, my sweetheart will be happy to know, is listed at **$400**.

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